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ON THE FOOT OF OBJECTS IN ANTIQUE ART-INDUSTRY.

By

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The splendid creations of antiquity, and its admirable productions of Art-industry can never be too frequently recalled to the memory and too strongly recommended to the study of the art workers of the present day. It is not, however, in the strict and stiff imitation even of their best models, but in the intelligent use and application of the laws which manifest their existence through them that their great value consists. The productions of the times of Louis XVI., and our attempts at Pompeian wall decorations will never obtain any general acceptance; they are but still born children, incapable of vitality. They are destitute of all conscious apprehension of the principles and laws of style which prevail among the ancients, an apprehension which alone is capable of imparting a due conception of the dignity of their models, or of teaching us the true method of adapting ourselves to them. To prove this we will only bring forward one exemplification, namely the Foot of objects of ancient art-industry, and endeavour to show the laws of style which it develops.

Taking, first of all, the Vase of antiquity, we see that the Foot is either in immediate union with the body, or that it has a more independent substantial importance of its own as a stand or pedestal. In either of these cases, it has its own proper form, defining with strictness its position and significance. In the first case we see in it the circular base, either plain or with a contour of outswelling lines, and connected with the body of the vase by a coloured or plastic band. Figs. 1. 2. 3. 4. A further development is obtained by a cavetto which, analogous to the trochylus of the foot of the Ionic column, but rather yielding to the particular direction of the foot,

is inserted between the ring below and the body of the vase above. Figs. 5. 6. 7. The absolute indivisibility between the vessel and its foot is unequivocally expressed by the symbol of the band or torus.

It is different with the more independent foot, or with that which is supposed to be independent. This no longer appears only as conceived with regard to the effect of its downward direction, but is represented as in opposition to the vase, and as an independent supporting member with an upward tendency. Its simplest and typical form occurs in a cylinder expanding both above and below. Fig. 8. In an artistically executed form, this pedestal has a proper finish above, a crowning piece, which, with due relation to the vase becomes a cyma, the symbol in art which always marks the part it covers as independent and finished, but in statical conflict with a part above it. Fig. 9. If this high foot or socle is again lengthened, then these simple forms are more richly articulated, and the double tendency divided by a line of separation, wreath or band, which, according to its nature, again serves to connect the two directions. The right application of this cyma distinguishes almost every one of those creations of antiquity which we take as perfect models, and is essential to the correct interpretation of antique decoration.

If, by way of exemplification, we observe an antique altar, Fig. 16, we see that, as if complete in itself, it is closed above by the well known wave lines of the cyma. But if an erection of this kind does not stand alone and isolated, but is employed as a support for a statue, or as the pedestal of a column, the ornamentation of the upper part is changed; instead of the closing finial above, there

will be a *cyma reversa* which serves for an intermediate expression of the relative independence of the pedestal, and its function with regard to the column itself. Fig. 17.

As here in the simple foot of the vase certain definite laws of decoration are distinctly seen, so is this also the case with every form of foot which is derived from any animal motive. These laws may be comprehended under the three following heads.

1. Every footshape of this kind must be in strict subordination to the architectural idea of the whole.

An exception may however be made in regard of those independent forms which have nothing to do with the structure of the whole. A table may, under some circumstances stand on deer's feet, an *epergne* on a hare's: but if these feet are represented in their naked reality with skin and hair, they appear by the side of the distinct and predominating style of architecture, as independent peculiarities destitute of motive, and in direct and conscious opposition to the whole.

The same effect is produced when the feet are so modelled and executed that a set of unimportant and fortuitous ideas are called up which are totally unconnected with the design indicated by the architecture.

2. All representations of feet borrowed from animated nature must correspond with the purpose and destination of the whole.

Vessels intended to be stationary or immovable must have under the foot a plinth to connect them with the ground. The absence of such a bond of union gives to the whole the character of absolute mobility, a characteristic which, by way of example, is certainly not in place in our street lampposts.

Articles of furniture &c., should, according to the degree of their mobility choose only those forms of animal feet which are the most homogeneous in respect to that characteristic. When the Assyrians placed the lion's foot under the throne, and gave to common chairs the foot of the deer, they acted certainly under the impression of the idea they entertained of the relative rapidity of movement in those animals.

3. These feet must not be applied to articles of furniture &c., in such positions as they never, or only exceptionally occur in the animal itself.

We can only represent to ourselves the feet of animals in active or passive state. Their active motions, such as walking, leaping &c., admit of no application in architecture, for our vessels, articles of furniture &c., are incapable of either action. However moveable their character, they must always appear at rest while doing their appointed service. The feet of animals, however, at rest, may be looked at in two ways, even in the sitting position: the hind legs having the doubly broken line, and the forelegs supporting the body with easier bend; then in the art of standing, the feet being placed almost vertically. Fig. 12. Both of these forms are found to be copied in antique art. The lower foot of the cande-

labra have the first, Fig. 13, the higher feet of tables and other articles have the last for their model. Fig. 14. In both however absolute rest is unmistakeably the essential and not accidental characteristic. Indeed this classical repose was seen to predominate in the whole realm of ancient art. The *cariatides* support the entablature apparently as motionless as the column itself, and when at a later period the greatest possible appearance of strength was given to these and similar supporting figures, it was forgotten that Pozzo had already, involuntarily indeed, made such attempts ridiculous by his invention of bent columns. Pillars, such was his conclusion, are to support the entablature; the human figure under such circumstances finds the weight too heavy, and bends beneath it, and as pillars are frequently replaced by such supporters, so the pillar itself may take the bend. Fig. 18.

The ancients in their just perception of nature opposed any composition of a vessel or article of furniture out of the members of animals panting or exhausted under their burdens, and these artists were scarcely even acquainted with art specimens representing *equilibristic tours de force*. (Fig. 15.) Thus their creations have acquired that quiet and serene character so seldom to be seen, though so much admired in our times. They knew how to obviate the monotonous impression made by so many straight lines, by ingenious compositions, and thus impart to the most insignificant objects the character of a work of art.

That these high pedestals were perhaps composed under the direct influence and impression of the contemplation of animals in repose is proved by this, that the head is sometimes connected with the foot, and indeed in such a manner that at a distance it appears like a slight profile of the upper part of the body of an animal in repose. The head surmounts the foot, but does not support the slab; also is it in the highest degree unmeaning to employ in so subordinate a purpose that one part of the body which it not intended to support any thing, but merely to close the figure above. The slab of the table is rather supported by the elongations of the foot which are just of such a height that they are themselves concealed by the shadows thrown from the slab, while the heads over the feet still remain visible.

It would be easy to point out a number of peculiarities in the execution of the foot of objects of antique art-industry, which now seem to be but little understood: but what has been said may be sufficient to induce thoughtful and aspiring artists to go back to the intelligent standard of ancient art, and from that, and not from the dead form to gain for themselves the due apprehension of it. If the old proverb is true "*poeta nascitur, rhetor fit*" so, in the very analogous relation between art and speech, the comparison will hold good: Nature produces the artist; but he who wishes to produce something sterling and superior in the realm of art-industry must become a real student.

